

WARNING SIGNS OF ASTHMA

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Prevention of asthma attacks is a key component of asthma management. Helping clients to recognize the symptoms that, for them, are precursors to an attack and teaching them what to do when their warning signs occur both regarding self-adjustment of medications and factors that contribute to asthma severity are important. Using either peak flow or symptom self-monitoring appears to increase a child's awareness of the disease status and control. Having an action plan in place is important. Source: Expert Panel Report, pg. 49, 61)

BACKGROUND

- Many children have predictable feelings or symptoms for a long time before they actually have trouble breathing or have an asthma attack. It is important keep a lookout for these symptoms each day, since they can be early warning signs of asthma.
- Your Early Warning Signs are written down in the child's Asthma Action Plan.
- The earlier you recognize your warning signs, the earlier you can start treatment. This may avoid the need for emergency treatment.
- If any warning signs occur, checking peak flow can give you more information about how bad the asthma is getting. Sometimes symptoms can appear mild, but peak flow can show that asthma is seriously out of control.
- The presence of early warning signs means that the child is in the Yellow Zone of the Action Plan.
- Late Warning Signs mean that the child is in the "Red Zone" and needs immediate medical care. Late warning signs include:
 - Wheezing that gets worse even after rescue medicine has been given.
 - Breathing that gets faster even after rescue medicine has been given.
 - Difficulty breathing:
 - Nostrils flaring.
 - Pale skin/blue-gray color around lips.
 - Increased coughing interfering with breathing.
 - Skin cold and sweaty.
 - Retractions of the muscles in the neck and between ribs.
 - Breathing fast
 - Grunting or wheezing.
 - Stomach muscles tense.
 - Difficulty walking or talking
- Using both peak flow and symptoms is the best way to assess the severity of asthma. The zone of the action plan is best determined by considering both symptoms and peak flow. If either indicates the red zone, then the child is in the red zone. If neither is in the red zone, but one is in the yellow zone, then the child is in the yellow zone.

ASSESSMENT

- Determine if the child knows this/her early asthma symptoms.
- Assess the child's knowledge of late warning signs of asthma.
- Check to see if child has action plan.
- Check to see if the child can use symptoms to determine the zone of Action Plan and what to do in response to symptoms.
- Check to see if the child has a peak flow meter and knows how and when to use it.

EDUCATIONAL MESSAGES

- Being aware of early symptoms and taking action early might prevent the need for emergency treatment.
- If any warning signs occur, checking peak flow can give you more information about how bad the asthma is getting. Peak flow can show that asthma is more serious than symptoms indicate.
- The presence of early warning signs means that the child is in the Yellow Zone of the Action Plan.
- Late Warning Signs mean that child is in the “Red Zone” and needs immediate medical care.
- Using both peak flow and symptoms is the best way to assess the severity of asthma.

ACTIONS

CHW ACTIONS	CAREGIVER ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•• If the child is unaware of early or late signs, help him/her identify the signs that usually show when asthma is worsening.• Contact the project nurse to let her know if further education about signs is needed.• Review how to use symptoms and action plan to figure out what to do to prevent asthma episode from worsening.• Instruct the caregiver to ask his/her health care provider for an action plan if he/she does not have one.• Provide a peak flow meter and instruct in use if child does not have one.• Make sure the caregiver understands that using both peak flow and symptoms is the best way to assess the severity of asthma. The zone of the action plan is best determined by considering both symptoms and peak flow. If either indicates the red zone, then the child is in the red zone. If neither is in the red zone, but one is in the yellow zone, then the child is in the yellow zone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•• Identify and learn to recognize your early warning signs of asthma.• Know the late warning signs.• Know how to check breathing rate.• Know what to do when early and late signs occur, based on Action Plan.• Use the peak flow meter when any signs (early or late) of asthma occur.

FOLLOW-UP VISITS

- As needed

SUPPLIES

- Peak flow meter (if available)
- Action Plan

EDUCATION HANDOUTS

- Is your child better? (p. 9); Clues that an asthma attack is coming (p. 10)

REFERRALS